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Hollow No More – the solid sounds of Delta Goodrem recorded on an Mbox

09/04/05

By Stephen Bruel

For professional musician, producer and international recording artist **Steve Mackay**, catching planes is all part of the job. However, Steve's carry on luggage does not consist of the usual suspects – a good book, sleeping tablets, iPod and duty-free liquor. Steve takes on board a fully functional recording studio which has been used in the production of commercially released CDs of Delta Goodrem and Brian McFadden. And it can all be safely stowed under the seat in front of him or in the overhead locker.

At 23, Steve has also written for and recorded with Christine Anu, and has toured the globe accompanying Delta on guitar in front of 10,000 plus audiences and appeared on TV shows Top of the Pops in the UK and Rove Live and The Panel locally.

Steve Mackay and Delta Goodrem



"I've managed to get tracks released by some of the world's biggest artists using just an Mbox in the recording process," says Steve.

Steve explains the production process behind the song "Beautiful Madness" (B-side to the huge Delta hit CD "Out of the Blue") which he co-wrote with Delta and producer Billy Man. Using his Mbox, Steve recorded Delta's vocals in her hotel room in Brisbane, the beats and guitars in a mate's place in London, the piano in an apartment in St Kilda and then mixed the final result at Metropolis Audio music studios in Melbourne with sound engineer and Pro Tools guru Haydn Buxton.

Steve says the Mbox provides portability and quality which is essential when working with an artist such as Delta, whose schedule is so hectic.

"Any down time Delta has, she doesn't want to go back into a studio to work on her guitarist's ideas. It has to be done then and there and as quickly as possible," says Steve.

Another production and co-write was with Delta and Irish pop sensation Brian McFadden. Steve recorded the song "Hollow No More" (the B-side for "Almost Here") while in New York in his hotel room and then uploaded it onto an ftp site in the UK for the Guy Chambers mob to finish off. His Mbox recorded guitars are on the final produced cut.

Steve and Mbox at work



"Without the Mbox, I would have missed the opportunity, as in the case of jamming with Brian and Delta on the "Hollow No More" tune. If I could not go to my hotel room next door and whip up a demo there and then, it wasn't going to happen. Also, the fact that it's all Pro Tools makes it compatible with pretty much every decent studio anywhere on the face of the earth," says Steve.

Steve's Backpack Studio

Steve's carry on luggage consists of an Mbox, T41 IBM ThinkPad laptop, Evolution keyboard, Studio Projects C1 microphone, AKG headphones, external hard drive and leads. With the demands of life on the road, Steve required a portable recording solution that would be highly stable, durable and cost effective.

For assistance, Steve turned to Melbourne-based PC digital audio solution's guru **Vin Curigliano, of AAVIM Technology and Awake**. With a customer base numbering well into the hundreds, Vin prides himself on building quality machines that require very little or no support after they leave the shop.

"A good reputation takes years to build and only minutes to destroy. Delivering a working solution, while always maintaining the customer's best interest at heart is the key," says Vin.

Vin listened to what Steve wanted to achieve, how he wanted to work, and how much he wanted to spend. Vin chose an IBM T41 laptop and Mbox combination due to the solid build and quality components used, and then configured it through a meticulous and thoroughly tested and proven optimisation routine.

PC digital audio solution's guru Vin Curigliano



"On systems built from the ground up, the optimisations are introduced at the initial configuration of the O.S., where as the laptop solutions require a different approach, in layman's terms it is similar to reverse engineering – basically getting rid of all the extra crap running in the background," says Vin.

Steve is more than happy with the audio quality, stability and portability offered by Vin's solution, and enjoys the freedom associated with it. As a professional musician who is always searching out new opportunities whether commercial, artistic or both, life on the road can be both a blessing and a hindrance. As opportunities arise while travelling, seizing them requires technology that can respond to the combination of short time frames and hectic artistic and studio schedules. Steve says his Mbox and laptop - packed into his backpack - equips him for any opportunity on offer.

"Anytime you lay something down, it could be it. It could be the big one so you need to be ready. Mbox allows you to do this."

Steve Mackay has just completed filming an instructional guitar book and DVD, is collaborating with songwriters on a number of projects, and is developing an independent music magazine which will feature articles by Vin. When he is at home, Steve regularly talks to high school students about the music business.

